

Seminar on Mass Media and AIDS in Southeast
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Opening Remarks

By

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SEMINAR ON MASS MEDIA AND AIDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA
ORGANISED BY AMIC AND FACULTY OF PUBLIC HEALTH
August 17-19, 1994, Bangkok, Thailand



OPENING REMARKS

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Delivered at

Regional Seminar on Mass Media and AIDS in Southeast Asia
Bangkok Palace Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand
August 17-19, 1994

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen :

It is my Great pleasure to welcome all of you to Bangkok and to the Opening of the Regional Seminar on Mass Media and AIDS in Southeast Asia, Jointly Organised by the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Center or AMIC and the Faculty of Public Health of Mahidol University.

This seminar deals with a very timely and relevant topic. The AIDS Epidemic in Asia is worsening. From only a few reported cases in the Mid-80s, an alarming number of HIV-positive cases have been Reported, some estimates running to over one million cases of infection with the Human Immuno-deficiency virus or HIV that causes AIDS, according to a recent report by the Asian Development Bank. The same report stated that Asia is now threatening to replace Africa as the region hardest hit by the AIDS Epidemic. The World Health Organisation is estimating that 10 millions of the 30-40 million HIV cases Worldwide by the year 2000 will be in Asia.

The problem is approaching acute proportions. The increasing number of HIV cases will cause a considerable strain on limited resources in Asia. So much so, that some analysts are arguing that the AIDS epidemic will offset any gains made in the past two decades of unprecedented economic growth in the developing countries of Asia. They say that the spread of AIDS can cost an estimated us \$38-52 billion by the year 2000. Clearly something has to be done to check the spread of HIV cases. Undoubtedly, the media plays a very important role in creating public awareness of the AIDS problem and its prevention. On other disease has created so many misconceptions and myths than AIDS. There is a great need to dispel all these misconceptions about AIDS in order to effectively prevent its spread. Although there have been many excellent examples of AIDS-awareness campaigns in all the countries represented here, as I am sure will be made evident in the proceedings of this seminar, there is a need for more information and education campaigns aimed at creating public awareness of the AIDS problem and how AIDS can be effectively prevented.

Communications practitioners can provide much needed expertise in the areas of mass education and prevention programmes in schools, workplaces and government and non-government organisations. The print and broadcast media can also be a potent tool in disseminating information on AIDS. Studies have shown that the public relies to a certain extent on the mass media for information on AIDS. With the introduction of new communication technologies, the role of the Mass Media in Disseminating Health Information has become more potent. Thus, the Mass Media carries in itself an important responsibility to provide the public with relevant and accurate information on health in general, and communicable diseases such as AIDS in particular.

Linkages between AIDS-awareness and prevention government and non-governmental organisations and the media should be strengthened in order facilitate information dissemination on AIDS and to stimulate community action and involvement. Various channels of communications should be utilized in AIDS information including small community media and non-traditional media to ensure greater scope and coverage of communication campaigns.

The AIDS phenomenon poses a very important challenge to communication professionals. I therefore urge all of you to make use of this opportunity to discuss and formulate actionable recommendations on how media and health professionals can meet the challenge of protecting and promoting the health of the public through AIDS awareness and prevention.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the close cooperation between AMIC and the Faculty of Public Health of Mahidol University in organising this seminar. I wish you all a fruitful and productive seminar.

On this note it is now my pleasure to declare open this regional seminar on Mass Media and AIDS in Southeast Asia.